OPENING STATEMENT
CHAIRMAN JUDY BIGGERT
ENERGY SUBCOMMITTEE

Science and Technology Priorities in the Department of Energy Budget for Fiscal Year 2005

March 24, 2004

The hearing will come to order. I want to welcome everyone to this hearing of the Energy Subcommittee on the Department of Energy's (DOE) proposed investments in research and development for fiscal year 2005. Operating in the most constrained budget environment in many years, Congress has a duty to choose among competing priorities. And this year, the choices are especially.

Today, we will learn more about how the DOE plans to spend its limited resources. While 7.2 percent of the nation's GDP is spent on energy – a number that doesn't account for the indirect costs of securing those energy supplies – only 3.25 percent of the federal civilian R&D budget is spent on energy technology. As we face high oil prices not seen since before the first Gulf War, we must be clear about our priorities; our energy challenges are just too great for us to do otherwise.

That's why we will hear testimony today from witnesses from five DOE offices with responsibility for research and development across the board, including science, energy efficiency and renewable energy, fossil energy, nuclear energy, and electric transmission and distribution.

Turning to the Office of Science, I'll admit that I was disappointed when I saw the President's budget request of $3.4 billion for FY05. We know the long-term economic benefits from physical sciences research, and yet federal funding for research in the physical sciences has been flat for more than a decade.

It remains flat in the proposed budget for FY05, despite the fact that comprehensive energy bills passed by both the House and Senate included an authorization level of about $4 billion for the Office of Science in FY05. This represents nearly a 20 percent increase for the Office of Science over current funding levels. I think Congress has been clear that it supports increased funding for the Office of Science to make up for years of inadequate budgets. In FY04, Congress provided a one percent increase over the President's request. The two percent cut proposed for FY05 seems to ignore that Congressional support, and the justification for it.

That justification was clearly delineated last fall when the Office of Science released its twenty-year facilities plan, which describes the world-class scientific facilities we can build in this country if we invest at the levels included in H.R.6, the comprehensive energy package. This plan was the result of lengthy deliberations across scientific disciplines, and some plain old tough choices. Ray Orbach, the Director of the Office of Science, has performed a tremendous service to our nation's scientific research enterprise by leading the effort to develop a ranked list of priority facilities. The plan not only outlines the benefits of future research, but is a testament to the disciplined management approach that can serve as a model for other agencies. How the FY05 budget will impact that plan is one of the issues we will address today.

As for the Office of Nuclear Energy, Science, and Technology, I am very concerned about the heavy cuts proposed to nuclear energy R&D. The Nuclear Energy Research Initiative is eliminated. The Advanced Fuel Cycle Initiative is cut by one-third. Even the Nuclear Power 2010 program is cut in half.

Meanwhile, in the midst of the tightest budget conditions in decades, the DOE now has decided to create a brand new national laboratory called the Idaho National Laboratory. The irony is that at the very time that Congress is struggling to find dollars for nuclear R&D, DOE is taking those scarce dollars and using them to pay for infrastructure costs associated with a new laboratory.

While I support the Department's designation of a lead laboratory, I have serious concerns about how the Department is going about creating this laboratory. I am particularly concerned about the impact of these recent actions on existing nuclear R&D programs and facilities, including those in Idaho, that have served the nation well for decades. That's what I want to explore today. Some of the broader issues will be covered in more depth at a later hearing.

Unfortunately, I've exhausted my time before being able to express a concern I know many of my colleagues share. It has to do with the shrinking energy efficiency R&D budget, and its impact on programs designed to help industry operate more efficiently and, as a consequence, keep jobs in the U.S.

On that note, I will conclude by saying that I'm looking forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses here today, and to working with them and others to do the best we can to support science and energy related R&D. We are talking today about programs that matter a great deal to our nation's economic and energy future. During these tight fiscal times, we must set priorities and use scarce resources wisely. We are here today to make sure the proposed FY05 budget meets these standards.

Thank you very much.